

Brethren Evangelist

"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life."—Jesus

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Editorial

Long Life

It is said that the ordinary carp, if not interfered with will live 500 years. There are now living in the Royal Aquarium, in Russia, several carp that are known to be over 600 years old. If this life is the be-all and end-all of existence, the carp has decidedly the advantage of man. This lord of creation lives only 70 or 80 years, while an insignificant fish, by no means the best of the fish family, lives nearly ten times as long. If we are of more value than many fishes, we ought in justice to live proportionally as much longer. Perhaps we are doomed to die soon because of our prolific capacity for doing evil. But then good people, useful, indispensable people, die as early as the useless and the wicked ones. It is even said that the good are taken early, and the worthless spared. The carp may not be a harmful creature, but he is of little worth. Why should he enjoy five centuries of placid existence, softly couched on yielding waves? Why should he be given all these long years of life without trouble or pain, while man endures so brief a span, and so full of trouble and sorrow? Surely the builder of nature has not made all things equal, if this life is the sum of being. Surely there must be a life beyond, a sphere more genial to the mind and spirit, an environment far better suited to the sensitive soul, where all its faculties may expand in an atmosphere of peace and love and power.

Conviction an Element of Power

It is profitable for preachers to thoroughly acquaint themselves with the elements of pulpit power, all of which have been carefully analyzed and classified by able and discerning writers who have labored at the task with a zeal and devotion reminding us of the boy who tried to imprison the rainbow in a bag. For after all that has been learnedly said, written and published on the subject, it remains that the secret of power lies in character, a thing which is not culled from books or inculcated by rules, and particularly revolves around that pivot of character called faith. The question in one of its practical forms, as applied to the preacher, is resolved into these terms. Whether or not it is a just procedure, an average audience deduces its conclusions upon this point, intuitively or otherwise, from the manner of the preacher. For instance, as any one can testify, he discusses the awful doctrine of endless punishment in an easy, careless, almost flippant manner which unerringly leads to the inference that he is either destitute of sensibility, or that he doesn't believe the doctrine he preaches, the latter being the more general conclusion. Much the

same inference will be unconsciously gathered by the average listener as he hears the speaker talk about love, faith, atonement, prayer, eternal life. Too often we hear these great themes treated in a professional, perfunctory manner, devoid of genuine feeling, real earnestness and soul deep sincerity, a kind of preaching which is utterly shorn of power.

Now a man may believe a thing slightly, with a languid interest, or he may believe it thoroughly, deeply, with that belief which becomes a part of the life and stirs the deep places of the soul. Or he may be deceived by his own heart and imagine he believes when he does not, his so-called belief being nothing deeper than a mere intellectual, we might say doctrinal, heritage handed down in the direct line of natural succession. Or it may be simply the reflection of his environment,—of the public opinion which he inhales, involuntarily, very much as he inhales the atmosphere which envelopes him.

How far all this may promote real faith and strong conviction is a psychological question which we will not attempt to discuss here, but it is not in itself conviction, and should not be made a final resting place for the soul. Real conviction when it takes hold upon a man transforms him, and makes him an engine of power. If his doctrine happens to be an error, then he becomes a power for evil. Either for good or for evil the convinced man is a power, and those who listen to him recognize in his manner, his earnestness, his deep feeling, the tumultuous outflow of his soul, that the man speaks truly of that which is within him, of the certitudes upon which the soul rests solidly, and which he believes with all his might are essential and saving.

Let us therefore dig down to the foundations. Let us know assuredly what we really believe, how thoroughly we believe it, and then let the full force of conviction appear in what we do and say. So will power return to the preacher, and he will witness, both in himself and in those to whom he ministers, the transforming energy of incarnate truth.

Selfishness

How contemptible is an exhibition of selfishness—in others. And with what amusing ease we can turn from the condemnation of a selfish act in another to the defense of one of our own. Such cuteness of argument, such dexterity with the whitewash brush is amazingly funny. Growth in healthy experience will make a man less apologetic toward himself and more lenient toward others; but this kind of growth is a painful climbing up out of the natural man into the spiritual, and there are comparatively few who are capable of constant perseverance therein.